



(Research on Lifestyles, Values and Environment)
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH

FORTHCOMING SEMINAR

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45b AZ 04
University of Surrey

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Social Enterprise and Renewable Energy

The UK government's grand promise to reduce greenhouse gas emissions stands in strong contrast to its poor record in developing renewable energy. There is clear evidence that a growing number of individual citizens would like to 'do their bit' and are (looking into) installing domestic renewables. However the government's initial focus was on supporting large-scale, private sector projects; a strategy that was initially met with limited interest from key private sector players (e.g. the banks), and strong (local) public opposition.

My research is positioned between 'micro-level' individual initiatives and private sector initiatives, which tend to favour economies of scale. The delivery of renewable energy at the 'community' level tends to be characterised by various organisational forms that can be collectively labelled as 'social enterprise'. Before we can ask 'is there a bright future for renewable energy through social enterprise?', we first need to understand what social enterprises are and why/how renewable energy projects are developed by different types of social enterprises. Anecdotal evidence suggests that renewable energy initiatives in social enterprises are often driven by charismatic individuals who are highly entrepreneurial in spirit. These so called social entrepreneurs / community entrepreneurs /eco-entrepreneurs/green entrepreneurs/ environmental entrepreneurs share many of the characteristics of 'normal' entrepreneurs – which have been extensively studied in business schools. However they must also draw on other talents to deal with additional challenges such as juggling with multiple social and environmental objectives, dependence on the vagaries of external funding agencies, a 'workforce' that may include volunteers and the local community, and working within organisational settings that are not normally conducive to entrepreneurial ideas and the risks and rapid changes these may entail.

Enthusiastically embraced by both New Labour and the Conservatives, political support for the concept of Social Enterprise is not expected to wane any time soon. This should give academics both time and reason to study this phenomenon and the many ways in which it manifests itself in beliefs, expressions and practices of the stakeholders involved.

In this talk I will explore the research agenda around social enterprises and renewable energy, and present some preliminary findings from the first 7 months of my 2 year interdisciplinary fellowship sponsored by the ESRC.

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